

The Art of Writing

George Randolph Chester

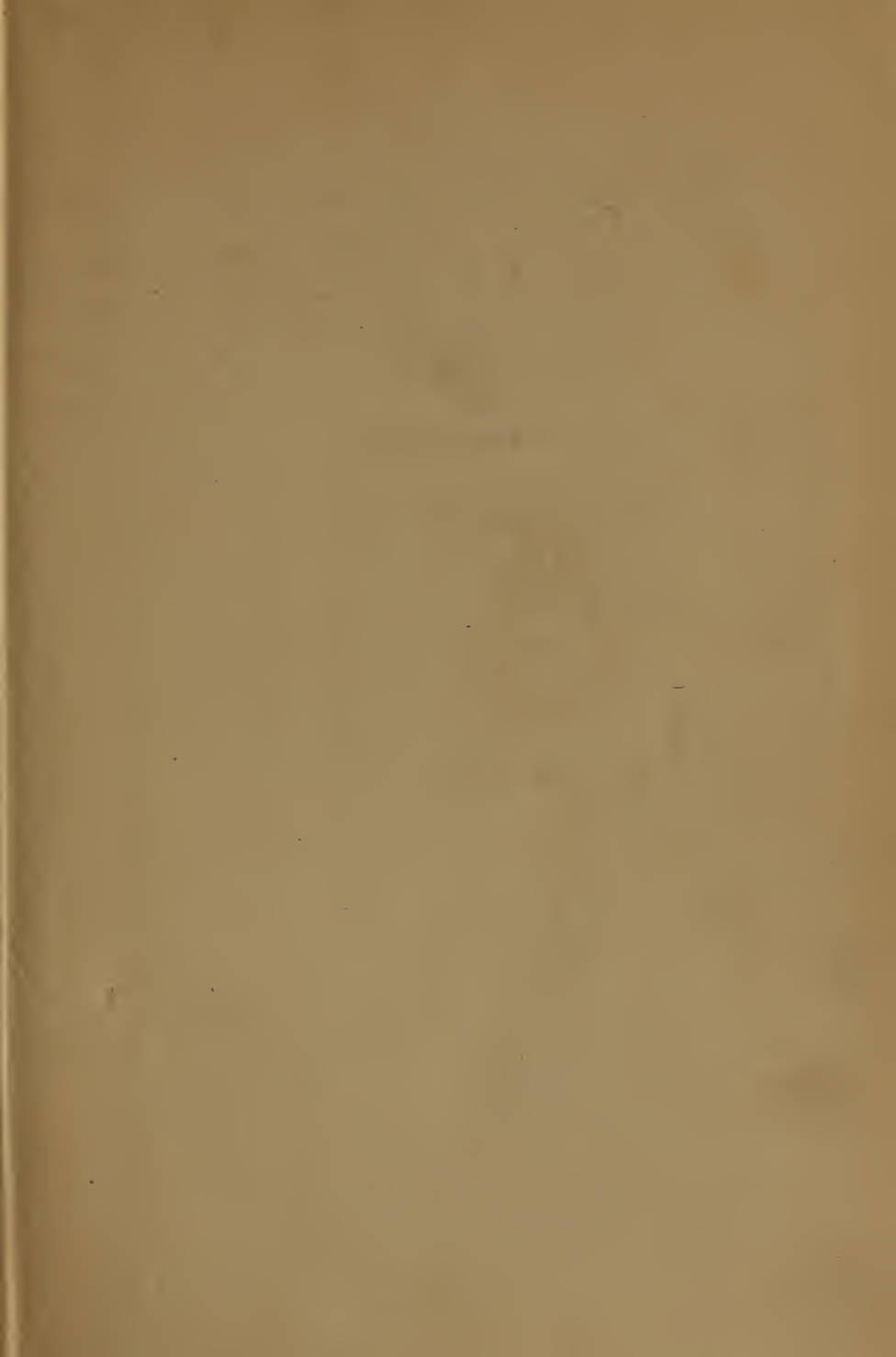


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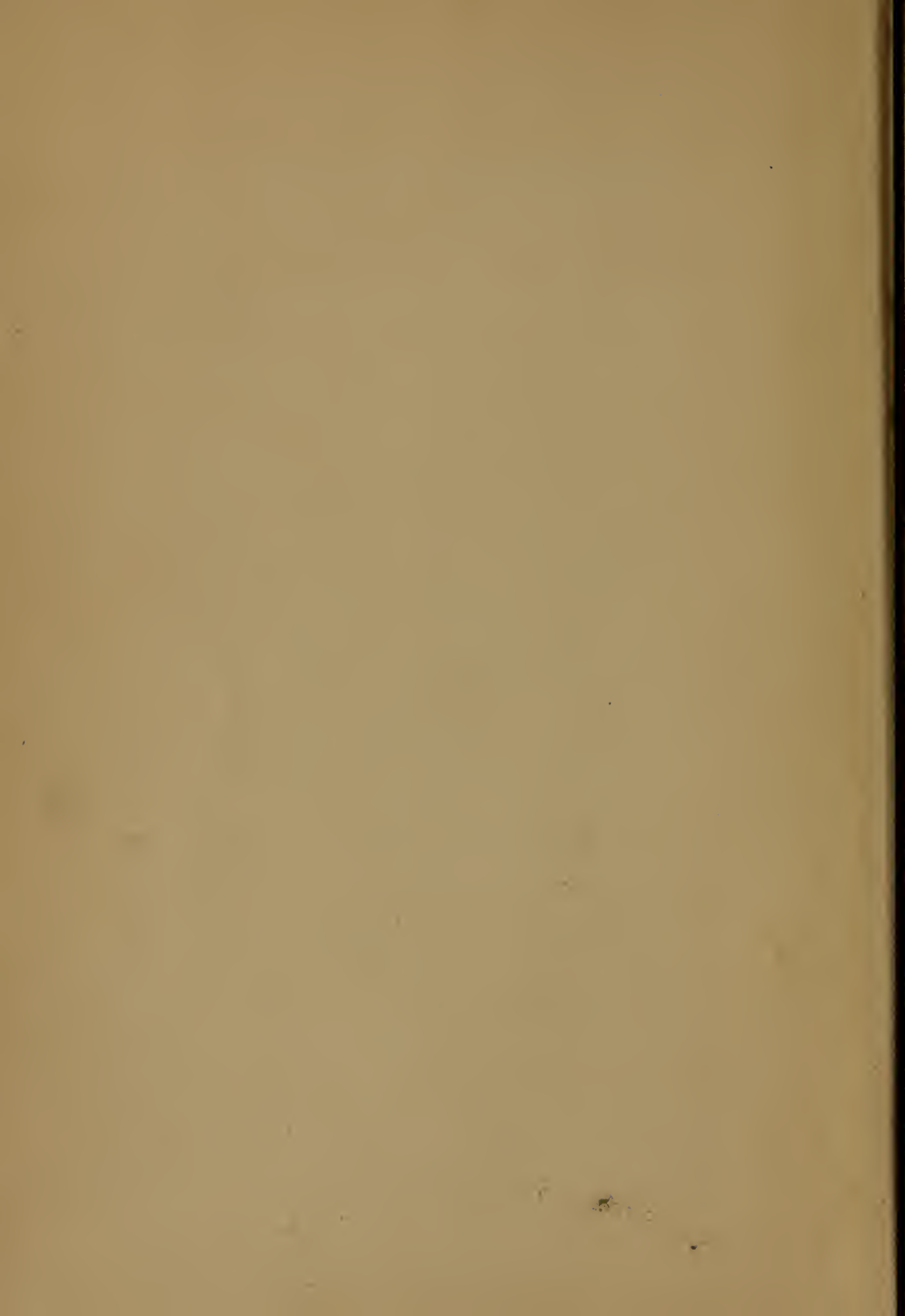
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THE ART OF WRITING



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By
George Randolph Chester



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Foreword

I find, in going over the following pages, that I have taken a most authoritative position; that, in some cases, I have written with apparent conceit and even apparent arrogance. I shall not change the passages which might seem to justify such conclusions. I have tried honestly and earnestly to set down the results of my experience in such a manner that they should be of actual help to those who wish to make a success of short story writing, and so have written frequently in the first person, and with vigorous decisiveness, wherever I wished to impress very forcibly certain points. It would be possible to remove my personality from these pages, but in doing so they might be made less forceful; accordingly they shall remain as they are, without apology and without appeal.

GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER.



Contents

	Page
I. The Sordid Side, - - - -	11
II. Apprenticeship, - - - -	16
III. Mental Equipment, - - - -	24
IV. Creativeness, - - - -	26
V. Imagination, - - - -	32
VI. Observation, - - - -	36
VII. Democracy, - - - -	42
VIII. Sympathy, - - - -	46
IX. Humor, - - - -	54
X. Industry, - - - -	57
XI. The Business Story, - - - -	60
XII. The Political Story, - - - -	64
XIII. The Detective Story, - - - -	67
XIV. Stories for Children, - - - -	70
XV. Stories About Children, - - - -	77
XVI. Stories of Adventure, - - - -	79

	Page
XVII. The Love Story, - - - -	81
XVIII. The Historical Story, - -	88
XIX. Dialect Stories, - - - -	90
XX. Stories Not to Be Written, -	92
XXI. Construction, - - - -	94
XXII. The Beginning, - - - -	98
XXIII. Development, - - - -	112
XXIV. The Ending, - - - -	119
XXV. Description, - - - -	120
XXVI. General Observations, - -	122
XXVII. Condensation, - - - -	125
XXVIII. Length of Stories, - - -	128
XXIX. Editing, - - - -	130
XXX. Preparing a Manuscript, - -	132
XXXI. Marketing, - - - -	138

THE ART OF WRITING



The Sordid Side

“Commercialism” is here considered first, because it is the most flaunted of all bugaboos in art. We have an inherited notion that an “artist” must, of necessity, starve and go in rags, be a poor business man, and have a soul above money. All nonsense! That silly fiction is a relic of past barbarian ages, when no profession but that of warfare really paid, either in honor or riches. To-day the successful artists, in every line, are abundantly rewarded, and only the unsuccessful ones, those least gifted with genius, must struggle with the wolf of poverty and whine that this is a soulless age. The period has happily passed when the literary worker’s fame and profits were collected only by his heirs; instead, the writers of to-day are, as a class, rather keen business people, not necessarily dissipated or improvident, and

prosperous enough to be self-respecting. Because you hope to be well paid for the creations of your fancy, do not, for one moment, fear that your finer sensibilities are to be destroyed. Instead, equip yourself for an artistic career, whether you intend to seek your expression through brush or chisel or pen, with the same care you would prepare for a commercial life, demand your just pay as boldly and receive it with as much self-esteem. Merely be sensible!

I speak of this so emphatically because I wish to combat, in the very outset, certain entirely false ideals that are quite likely to find lodgment in the minds of beginners. I doubt if there has ever been a time when the cry of commercialism was not raised anent matters of art, or when, on the other hand, artists did not prefer a hot porterhouse steak to a cold marble monument. It has come to be pretty generally acknowledged in these modern days that we shall be an extremely long time dead, and the full realization of this deep truth has the tendency to make one wish to bedeck this all-too-brief life of

ours with as many gay garlands as possible. In consequence the writers of this Gatling-gun age look upon their thoughts as truly golden, and pen them not so much for posterity as prosperity; nor are the thoughts any the less brilliant for their metallic sheen. It is all the matter of incentive, in which Art with a big "A" must say "brother" to Assets with a big "A;" and both are improved by the association. An empty stomach is not absolutely necessary to the development of a large soul.

Remember, too, that pose and performance do not go well together. The gentlemen of long hair and Byronic cravats who call themselves Bohemians, and who spend their guzzling time with kindred spirits in the discussion of literature and art and music, never write real stories nor paint real pictures nor compose real sonatas. Those master students of the human soul whose names we revere worked as industriously as shinglers, and did not know that they were producing literature when they wrote it. Moreover, throughout all the time these then commercial-minded men toiled they

doubtless had a thought for the diminishing flour barrel, and how the immortal work they were then producing might help to replenish it. In a word, art, as art, is never self-conscious.

What does all this mean? That we shall have no more sincere dramatic or literary or musical or graphic or plastic art? By no means. These things can not die any more than the innate longing of the human soul for higher and better and nobler things can die. Art will rise above all sordid circumstances in every age. It will find expression not alone in spite of, but partly because of the conditions that hamper it. We need not distress ourselves about art. It will take care of itself. We can do little for it. It is as irrepressible as the storms of heaven, and in night which seems the blackest, flashes of its divine radiance will gleam so vividly upon our skies that they will dazzle the world. In the meantime, between those glimpses of divine glory, reminding us with startling vividness that within us all there dwells a portion of the Godhead, we will all of us continue to

face the elemental realities of life, food and clothing and shelter and social position—and these demand money. So keep your hair short if you are men, and long if you are women; talk “literature” but little, and work at it much; earn money, and spend it.

Apprenticeship

If you plan to earn a living by authorship, you must first very thoroughly prepare yourself to earn a living at something else; for the business of writing, like any other, requires a long and arduous apprenticeship, and while one learns one must live. So prepare to work, and your temporary occupation, or successive occupations, will be of great value in ripening that knowledge of the world without which no one may hope to successfully enter this field. Considered merely as a school of experience, the calling best fitted as a preparation for this particular career should require one habitually to express thoughts and describe occurrences in writing; it should habitually bring one into contact with all phases of life; it should be of broad and varied interests and should provide a steady income. The only occupation which seems to fit all these require-

ments is the newspaper profession, and its value for this end is proved by the fact that from the ranks of the newspaper writers come more successful magazine contributors than from any other class of workers.

The advantages of a newspaper training are many and obvious. In the first place the reporter writes much and rapidly, and he sees in actual print what he has written, an invaluable privilege, learning from day to day to correct his own style by experience and comparison. He learns lucidness and directness, for newspaper writing permits of no unnecessary words. He acquires the habit of reliability. When he is sent upon an assignment he knows that he must come back with the item and that he must write it without a moment's delay. He loses the tendency to absurd posing, for his associates have penetrated to the kernel of things, have made it their business to detect shams at a glance, and have the gift of ridicule developed to an art. Above all, he comes in contact with every sort of man and woman, with every side of life, with all human pathos and comedy and tragedy. The

whole world, all its passions and its emotions, its weaknesses and its strength, its degradation and its nobility passes before him in review as a part of his daily routine, and if he has the proper mental equipment his work supplies him not only with material that he will use for years, but with a trained faculty for appreciating that material when he finds it.

To the newspaper life there are, it is true, a few drawbacks. The haste with which articles are written is likely to encourage slipshod English; one must work hard and at all hours; the associations outside the office are not always of the best, and one must be of sturdy moral fiber to resist the formation of habits which tend to make success impossible; there is, last of all, the temptation to "drift" and to remain a reporter, which, while an interesting occupation, has but very little future in it. Still, weaklings are not likely to attain to much eminence anywhere, and every walk of life is beset with temptations to be fought, and overcome, temptations by the resistance of which to gain strength.

Some one, with wisdom and justice, has said that the newspaper calling is the finest in the world to get into to get out of, meaning thereby that it is an unsurpassed stepping-stone to many other better-paying lines of endeavor; and, as a matter of fact, almost any profession can show among the ranks of its most successful men a large proportion of ex-reporters. For the purpose of the would-be story writer, however, a metropolitan daily is not to be recommended, especially in the beginning, for in the large cities the work is too minutely specialized. The so-called "country" press—meaning by that the newspapers in cities of two hundred thousand or less—is much better. There even the "cub" reporter is given a varying range of assignments which would never fall to his lot in the very large cities. He is likely to have his turn at the police route, at the courts, the city hall, the business district; he will have a chance to report a political meeting, a society function, a business consolidation, a divorce case, a slum settlement, a collection of pictures, a millinery opening, a "show." The result of

his gleanings and the irreverent manner in which he "writes up" these various affairs are likely to be somewhat unpalatable to society, business, art, and the drama, but it is all excellent training for the "cub," and contributes vastly to the range of his palette of colors. He attains an absolute and invaluable sureness of gauging human motive, and after some four or five years of work along these lines, if he cares to go to a larger city he is almost certain of securing employment which will still further extend his range. The ideal preparation for story writing would be to tour the country in the capacity of a finished reporter, working in many cities—and to avoid, then, the impulse to become merely a polite tramp.

One thing must be borne in mind: that newspaper men work very hard when they work, and when through they are likely to play just as energetically. The toiler in this line who expects to write a better-paying grade of material than that resulting in his daily column or so must practice at it constantly, must give up a portion of his leisure to more serious literary effort, and

must try incessantly, from the time he starts, to write magazine stories. If a reporter will begin by religiously devoting one solid hour each day to this attempt, never faltering, never wavering, keeping the end steadfastly in mind, for years if need be, in spite of all discouragements, he is bound to succeed if the gift of story-writing is in him; and there is no other way! It seems much to ask, but it is no greater price than is demanded for eminent success in any other line.

There are other apprenticeships which have proved valuable, other walks of life which have produced their quota of story-tellers. One modern success was a school teacher on the East Side in New York. The human interest in her stories was so profound that people of every degree understood and appreciated them. So long as she wrote of her actual environment her success was unbounded. When she attempted to wander off into realms with which she was not so familiar, her stories were but mediocre. Had she had a wider experience of life, it is not only possible but highly probable that she could have treated of univer-

sal conditions and have produced what yet remains to be written—the great American novel.

Another successful writer was an assistant district attorney, a club man in private life, and officially in daily contact with criminals of all degrees. He combined these two phases of life with great deftness, and wrote stories along both lines, separately and in combination, which have earned him a distinct place in the magazine field and renders him an assured income of very comfortable proportions.

Writers of many other previous occupations have been more or less successful, but in all of them the fundamental principle was the same. Their positions were such that before they wrote successfully they had come in contact with a limitless number of people, and so intimately that they were able to study them in close comparison. It is not possible for all to be newspaper reporters, nor school teachers, nor district attorneys, but whatever pursuit in which one is placed, by determination or by circum-

stances, where there are opportunities for study of varied humanity there are possibilities to gain an understanding of the human soul, and that is the first and the greatest requisite of the story-writer.

Mental Equipment

When the apprentice is finally able to take up authorship as a serious career, he will not call his output "literature" any more than a veteran reporter calls himself a "journalist." The ephemeral writing of no period has a right to call itself by any high-sounding title. Literature is hoary-headed, and some of it, it must be confessed, is even senile and decrepit. It attains the dignity of its title only with age, with the passing of time which proves its right to continued existence by its having continued to exist. However, the more or less involved writing of the past is to be valued no particle above the crisp and lucid writing of the present. The latter needs only to be winnowed, and out of the mass that is now being produced there is no doubt that the usual proportion

will be found of permanent value. It is only that our nearness to it interferes with the perspective.

You yourself may give your name to this coming epoch of American literature; but you will not choose authorship as a profession; authorship will choose you. If you have the necessary qualifications they will not let you rest; and this brings us to the matter of equipment.

Leaving aside the purely mechanical requirements of a good command of English, which must of course be had if you expect to enter this field, you must have these seven gifts: Creativeness, imagination, observation, democracy, sympathy, humor, and industry.

Creativeness

If one has not the same instinct which would urge him to become an inventor, a composer, an explorer, a pioneer in any walk of life, he will succeed only in becoming a copyist, and a copyist earns but a copyist's pay. A story, to be interesting, must be full of the same inventive faculty which would go to the fashioning of a wireless motor, or any other triumph of constructive ingenuity. The newspapers frequently contain true stories which are alive with dramatic interest, and many which would at first glance seem but to need polishing to reveal themselves as gems of fiction, and indeed, of many of these stories it is often said that they are "as good as a romance." This is seldom, if ever, entirely true. On examination these interesting occurrences will be found to be lacking in some vital element, and if turned

directly into fiction they would seem but very tame.

The most dramatic of real life happenings are to be looked upon as but raw material. Their great fault lies in the fact that they are abnormal, else they would not be considered as news; and it is not the abnormal which proves of the greatest worth in fiction. To be able to construct the normal, or rather to deal with the abnormal so that it shall seem to be normal, or shall illustrate the normal by emphasizing its divergences, is the true creative art in storytelling. To make people say, when they have read some clever characterization, "Why, I know people exactly like that," is to have achieved a triumph, and yet, to accomplish this requires a high form of creativeness.

"To hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature" is quite as much the province of fiction as it is of the drama. To offer this reflection is, too, the ideal of the painter and the sculptor; yet, when the finished product of any of these arts is examined it will be found that the mirror is a deceptive one in

that, while seeming to be accurate, it reflects nothing with absolute fidelity. Upon the stage all emotions are exaggerated, all action is accelerated, all motives are intensified, all characters are deliberately overdrawn, conversations are condensed and abbreviated so that they come directly to the point that must be made; yet with all these distortions, or, to speak more truly, by means of them, the effect of reality is produced. The most brilliant conversation of real life, if transferred verbatim to the stage, would become a dreary and a tedious thing because of the lack of concentration and crisp directness.

The artist who paints a picture of an ideally beautiful woman spends much time in the search of a model who will exactly meet his requirements, and yet when he finds her he does not paint a portrait of her. He corrects the inevitable defect. He paints a perfect nose, perhaps, upon an otherwise imperfect countenance. Perhaps in forming his ideal figure he paints the head of one woman, the bust of another, the arms and limbs of still another. The sculptor pro-

ceeds in exactly like fashion. Nothing is perfect. It remains for the artist to create perfection, and he achieves this ideal in exact proportion to his skill and to the perfectness of his conception. So, while the writer of fiction must invariably go to real life for his models, he must never attempt to make them mere portraits. He must supply what they lack, and in this his creativeness must come into play.

This applies not only to character-drawing and description, but to plot and incident as well. Out of an approximate half dozen characters and half dozen scenic backgrounds and half dozen incidents the writer must create an entire new world, and yet one illustrative of the world we all know. His characters, if he has wrought wisely and well, will be found, on close analysis, to be like no living people whom any one has ever met, and yet the most of them must seem like people whom we all have known. Only the central actor or actors in your drama should be unusual, and not always even these. The incidents will be found, on deliberate study, to occur with an opportune-

{ must seem to be occurring most naturally. ness never met with in life, and yet they This is the true creative power, and without it no writer can succeed.

As an exercise, try to set down, accurately and briefly, confining yourself to a hundred words each, what you think you know of the characters of ten of your neighbors or acquaintances. When you have done this, go over each commentary carefully and with calm, deliberate judgment. You will find that, unconsciously, you have exaggerated out of its true proportion some characteristic of each person, and have omitted to give due prominence to certain offsetting characteristics. Try as you may to be fair, you will find that your sense of justice has been outweighed by your personal prejudices, even at the time when you were trying to be most judicial. Aiding your prejudices, your creative faculty has already been at work. This is one of the psychological reasons why "gossip" is seldom, if ever, true.

Revise these brief character-drawings rigidly, and compel yourself to be absolutely

just. You will find that your characters in the second writing are not nearly so picturesque or interesting as in the first, where your creative faculty had unconsciously heightened their coloring.

Now write the ten character drawings a third time, allowing your creative faculty full play, and build up the characters as they would be useful to you in fiction, exaggerating them all you like but still compressing your estimations into the hundred-word limit. You will find now, if your work has been well done, that your people have become more real to you than the persons from whom they were drawn. They are warmer, more insistent of life and motive. Building upon necessarily imperfect types, you have *created* personages entirely typical, in place of partly so, of their leading characteristics. This illustration, though perhaps a lame enough one, explains what I have been trying to tell of the difference between cold fact and colorful fiction, between imperfect realism and more perfect idealism, between copyism and creativeness.

Imagination

Imagination goes hand in hand with the creative faculty. It not only builds up in advance the ideal which the creator tries to attain, but it furnishes the accessory detail which places that ideal in its logical environment. It supplies the waving trees and the green grass and all the scenic background against which the tragedies and comedies of your mimic life are enacted. It is by imagination's magic aid that the men and women of fiction seem to truly and actually live and move and have their being in the minds of their creators.

It is probably a very safe venture to state that every successful writer sees his characters as vividly as if they were in the flesh. They walk abroad, and the sun shines on them; the heat of midday warms them and the breezes of night chill them; they respond to every phase of emotion; their

hearts beat under the thrill of love; their blood surges with hate; their eyes dim with tears. They are real, virile, human beings, and, having fixed in his mind the motif of his plot, having devised his situations, and having brought into created being the people who are to work out his comedy or his tragedy, the writer gifted with this wonderful faculty of imagination has but to keep the eye of his mind steadfastly upon his characters and watch them work out their story for him. He only needs to set down what they do and say.

Try a simple test of this. Place in your field of mental vision a man and a woman. Let the woman be, say, brunette and vivacious, the man tall and stern. They are standing amid bleak trees. The cold twilight is coming on. There are little flakes of snow in the air. The man suddenly stoops and picks up something from among the dry leaves at his feet. The woman as suddenly springs for it and tries to take it away from him. Are they laughing when they do this, or are they in desperate earnestness? Look at them and see.

What is the object over which they are wrestling? Is it a tell-tale letter, a document of importance, or perhaps a kerchief with a strange initial embroidered in the corner? It is a little too dark to see from a distance what the object may be, but there is just a glint of white.

With these two characters and this situation in your mental vision, keep within sight of the man and the woman, and see what they do. Construct your own story. Go back and create a series of incidents which might have led up to this situation. Go forward and create the climax to which this leads, but always keep the imaginative vision of the two, as if in the actual flesh and blood, in your mind.) There is a house near by. You can see a gleam of light through the half-denuded branches of the trees. Who is in that house? Is it the man's wife or the woman's husband? Is it the man's father and mother or the girl's? Or are these two man and wife, and are children there? Out of your knowledge of probable human events you may select a thousand hypotheses to form a background.

and an explanation and a denouement for this man and this woman among the trees in the chill twilight struggling for the possession of something that glints white in their hands; but if, while you pursue the contributory facts, you lose clear mental vision of the actual features and bodies of the man or the woman, of the salient points of their scenic environment, your imagination is at fault and you can not write interestingly. (Mere creativeness without imagination is the cause of the dry-as-dust stories you read.) You must have both, and they must work in absolute harmony, neither one operating to the detriment of the other.

Observation

This is the faculty upon which both creation and imagination are built.

After all, we have finite minds, and man only creates after known forms; he only imagines upon material foundations. Our most brilliant castles in the air are but more delicate variants of familiar structures of brick and stone; the most expert builders of air-castles, then, are those who have most closely observed and mentally indexed to minute detail our mundane castles.

There is no end to the store of information, scarcely obtainable from reference-books, which the observing mind will and must acquire. What wild flowers and what garden flowers bloom in certain months? What trees are indigenous to certain localities, and what are their characteristics of sprouting their leaves and developing them and shedding them; of blossoming and bud-

ding and bearing fruit? Have you noticed how the white under sides of leaves, while fluttering up in a breeze, give quite a different shade of green to a tree? Have you observed the differing apparent color of still or running water at differing times of the day, at differing times of the year, under differing atmospheric conditions? How many common insects can you recall and describe? What effect has a frown upon the other features of a man's countenance? How many sorts of sunsets, as infinite in their variety as the shapes of clouds can you at this moment mentally catalogue and briefly describe? Have you ever noticed the peculiar heave of the body given by a man straightening up under a hod of brick, or the unconscious rhythmic pauses, for rest of the muscles, indulged by a man mixing mortar?

At this moment, as an exercise, try to describe the facial expressions of ten men, all between the ages of thirty-five and forty, all differing, and yet none abnormal. Give to each some characteristic mannerism or gesture, due to nervousness or habit. Try to

write the descriptions of these men, confining yourself to fifty words for each one, yet allowing your descriptions to be full enough to convey a satisfying mental picture. Let us stand these ten men up in a row and see what they look like:

“Number one is short and fat, with wide lips and wide teeth and a wide nose. His round cheeks are pink like a young boy’s, and his whole expression, except for the shrewd lines about his eyes, is one of almost cherubic infancy; yet every once in a while he winks almost imperceptibly with his right eye to emphasize some minor point in his conversation. He is very self-important, is number one, and jolly, too, but nevertheless crafty.”

Let us count this. Seventy-nine words. Too many by twenty-nine. This, however, is the first writing, just as it occurred to us. Now we must edit it and reduce our number of words to the given figure without sacrificing the picture. Let us try. Here is the second attempt:

“Number one, self-important and apparently jolly, is short and fat, with wide lips

and wide teeth and wide nose. His round, pink cheeks make him seem of almost cherubic infancy, but shrewd, crafty lines hem his eyes, and occasional sly winks flicker from the right one while he talks."

So much for Number one. Right after or immediately preceding his description, he ought to say something brief and pointed which will further bring out his character, and every time he is brought anew into your story, brief reference should be made, as he speaks, to his receptive cherubic appearance or his craftiness or his wink, thus keeping his picture fresh in the mind of your reader.

Now, without losing sight of this guileful gentleman, let us take the next one in line:

"Number two has a mustache cut off in a stiff line above his upper lip, and it seems to bother him a great deal, for his nervous hand is constantly straying to it, trying to put the invisible and long-since-clipped ends into his mouth. For the rest, he is lean and cadaverous, with a narrow forehead and shifting gray eyes and stiff, wiry hair, and he has an air of being constantly upon the

alert lest some one might tap him suddenly upon the shoulder and tell him that he is arrested."

Ninety-four words. We have been very extravagant in our analysis of this interesting character. We must cut down his description, however, to almost one-half, and still retain the same strength of portraiture and character-drawing; for, observe this, no portrait description, unless it conveys with it an idea of character, is worth the setting to paper.

This condensation is a much more difficult task than the other, but it must be done. Here is the result:

"Lean and cavaderous number two has a narrow forehead, shifting gray eyes, and stiff, wiry hair. His hand strays nervously to his straight-clipped mustache, trying to put into his mouth the missing ends, and he seems constantly alert lest a sudden tap upon the shoulder might mean his arrest."

Merely by way of illustration two of these ten characters have been described. Portray the other eight yourself, still retaining clearly the mental pictures of all the ones

previously brought into existence, standing in their row, more or less impatiently, according to their natures, and you will find to just what degree your powers of observation have been unconsciously at work. If you can not go further than four more distinctly drawn characters, cultivate your observation. Study the faces of people whom you meet. Watch their actions. It should be said, however, that a deliberately cultivated faculty of observation will never completely take the place of a natural one, one which, arising through a universal interest in all objects and in all surroundings of life, has taken unconscious note of all its minute and vital details. The importance of this faculty can scarcely be overestimated, as you will discover to your later humiliation if you set down details without knowing them to be entirely accurate. You would make yourself very foolish, for instance, to have flies or mosquitoes annoy a character in your story at some mountain resort, for at very easily accessible heights, quite delightful to human beings, flies and mosquitoes can not exist.

Democracy

Democracy is essential, but it must be instinctive, not forced or self-conscious. You must talk with both bank presidents and ditch diggers, as you have opportunity, with the same personal interest, an interest which arises not from mere curiosity nor even from definite purpose, but from your innate brotherhood, which makes these and all grades between and beyond but men, and human, and closely akin to your own clay. If you can do this without priggish inner aloofness, without toadyism on the one hand, or, upon the other, without the condescension which you fondly but futilely believe that you can conceal, you will become intensely interested in the struggles, the failures, the ambitions, and the triumphs of both, and you will gain the sometimes humiliating but always wholesome lesson that there is but very lit-

tle difference in any of us, except as to the merest of externals. Strip the roughened hide from your ditch digger and the massaged and velvety skin from your banker, take from the one his probable crudities of language, and from the other his more or less affected niceties of speech, and you will find their code of ethics much alike, their humanity exactly the same. They have the same capacity for love and hate, the same self-struggles, the same belief in their own preponderance of good above evil.

It must be your task to have as much association with as many different sorts of men as possible, to strip from them this outer husk of use and habit, heredity, training, and environment, and lay bare the hidden man. Find this first, then you can restore the shell and study with intelligence divergent modes of thought and habits of life, and the varying expressions of these that are made necessary by different surroundings and opportunity. After all, you are searching for the undying mysteries of immortal humanhood, a recognition of which must be at the root, if not at the sur-

face, of every worth-while story, whether it be comedy or tragedy; and you are just as likely to find your soul problem in a squalid tenement room as in a Fifth Avenue mansion, or just as likely again, avoiding these two extremes, to find it in some pleasant home of the moderately well-to-do, or in some cottage of that large class which, though without hope of riches, has fought away the threat of poverty.

A writer must be of no caste or class. He must be of all castes and all classes, for the problem of life is infinitely larger than environment or custom, or accidents of birth or breeding or wealth. Remember that the people about you, as distinctive and as individual as they may be, are, after all, as viewed in their true perspective with creation, ephemeral creatures of no consequence, who live but for a day and flutter their idle lives away until they die in the chill of the evening by uncounted thousands, without having left any impress whatever upon the earth that bore them, or upon its vital affairs. A hundred years from now perhaps not one out of all the people you know will

be remembered; but humanity itself, with which, on the final analysis, you deal, is everlasting. If you are most fortunate you may meet men of large affairs, but even among these there are very few whose deeds, whose graves, whose very names will not be quickly forgotten, and even these few are but ordinary clay. Beneath your story, then, of their trifling emotions and the puny episodes in which they figure, there must be something universal, something which applies, just as well in one age as in another, to all humanity in its larger relation to the spirit of all things. It is not always possible to segregate this kernel of universal humanity, to put your finger upon it, to say that this deep, underlying truth is the thing you wished to prove or to illustrate; but you may be quite sure that if your story awakens a quick response in the minds and hearts of the majority of your readers, you have, perhaps by blind instinct, woven a grain of this intangible leaven into your work.

Sympathy

Sympathy must be a part of your democracy, and a large part. You must try, in the attempt to understand yourself, to obtain an understanding of every other man. You must try to know his mental outlook; to find out what he thinks and why he thinks it. You must bring yourself to appreciate precisely why the horse-thief stole the horse, how he justified himself in that act, and sympathize with him in so far as to see why, had you been in his place, with his heredity, training, environment, and mode of thought, you, too, would have stolen the horse and felt that you had a legitimate excuse.

You can not paint the woes of others unless you yourself can, by comprehension at least, suffer that woe. Actual suffering would bring you nearer to an understand-

ing of it, perhaps, but it might also blunt your other faculties of creation, imagination, and observation, and blunt, too, your desire to observe, to imagine, and to create; but so long as you are thoroughly conscious of the capacity to suffer, so long as there lie in you the conscious elements of woe and of sorrow, you can project yourself into that frame of emotion long enough and clearly enough to analyze it, and to set down its salient features. And that capacity can come about only through sympathy.

Shut yourself in for a moment. You are now a man of virile middle age who have fought your way from obscurity to independence. You have been self-centered in business. You are married. Your wife, still retaining, in your eyes, her youth and beauty, has been your trusted helpmate through all these years. You have loved her and have placed implicit confidence in her. At the very point when you are able to set aside your more weighty business problems and to sit back with a sigh of content and say, "I have won, and I can now begin to enjoy life," you have come home to find that

your wife, tiring of the long struggle and of what she deems inattention on your part, has eloped with a man you had considered to be your best friend.

You find that the telephone is cut off. You have inadvertently locked yourself in. There is no way to get out until morning. You are entirely alone in that empty house with all its haunting memories, and with no human soul in whom you may confide. You must pass the long night there with no company but your own tumult of thoughts. Outside there is nothing but darkness.

Now consider. Lose your own self completely. Actually be this man. What are your emotions through that night? What floods of rage and murderous fury surge through you? What softening memories come to torment you? What bewilderments overwhelm you as you try to understand how this terrible thing could be? What self-reproaches come to you?

There occurs, at some time during that night, a crisis, during which your emotions crystallize into a definite purpose; and then

in what desperate mood do you meet the dawn?

We will now say that you have passed through this ordeal. What you have suffered would fill pages, yet no one would care to read all that you could write about your mental and moral and physical struggle. What you must do is to pick out the salient features of that struggle; to give not the detailed steps but the *impression* of that night of agony in as few words as possible, so that the reader, in passing with you through that period of torture, will gain a complete *feeling* of your suffering and know just how it was, as if he had himself suffered. That appeal to his sympathy through your own is a higher art than the detailed analysis of every step in this mental and moral and physical cataclysm. The former uses of the coldly scientific analysis and the present use of the impressionist method in producing an emotional effect upon the reader, is one of the chief divergences between the old school of fiction writing and the modern school, and the modern school is vastly better.

For a test, write your hypothetical experiences of that night as fully as you like, then cut it down exactly one-half. Cut the residue down another half, still trying to produce the effect of a night of agony, and without sacrificing any phase of the episode of your mental attitude during it; then see how much better and more effective is the quarter-length than the full-length composition.

Take other situations which demand sympathy, and see how you can handle them.

You are a young woman, attractive, refined, pure, intelligent, spirited. You have been raised, if not in luxury, at least in comfort. You are the oldest child. Your father dies, leaving behind him nothing but debts. Everything is sold, and you, with your mother and two younger sisters, go away from the loathed place where suddenly you find that you have no friends. The struggle for life begins. Your mother is ill, the two sisters are too young, and perhaps too delicate, to work. You try to find employment, and in the first place into which you go you are met with a coarse insult to your youth

and your attractiveness and your womanhood. Still you can not give up the struggle. Your needs force you. There is very little at home to eat. There is rent to be met. Everything salable has been sold. You have positively no recourse. You must earn money. You meet with rebuff after rebuff and with insult after insult; sometimes with worse—with kindness which acts as a cloak to insult that bides its time and opportunity. Put this soul and its torments on paper, without melodrama and without artificiality, if you can!

Again, you are a man of below the average in education, intelligence, breeding, opportunity, and environment. You have committed a crime, perhaps in the heat of passion, perhaps as a rash expedient. They are hunting you. You are hiding in a dark corner in a cellar, half concealed by some rubbish. You hear footsteps coming down the stairway. You are desperate. You are cowering, with all your muscles tense, ready for flight or fight. The gleam of a lantern accompanies the steps, and the lantern swings closer and closer to your corner.

Besides the foremost man, who is carrying the lantern, there are three others, all huge men, your equals in physique, and they are all armed. You have a revolver in your hand as you wait. Your heart beats so vigorously that you fear it must be audible. The lantern approaches quite closely, then it turns, and the men who have been coming straight toward you walk away to other parts of the dim cellar. They make the rounds and return to the bottom of the steps. They are about to go up, when the leader with the lantern turns back, comes closely a little part of the way again toward your corner, but finally gives up the search and goes upstairs with the other men.

Of course you can not approve of that wretch, even as he cowers there in the cellar, with his revolver gripped in his hand so hard that it leaves the impress of its every marking in his palm, but you must sympathize with him. Be that man in your sympathy and write his emotions, then condense them to a mere paragraph so that you can make your reader, who also can not possibly

approve of him, feel with him that same human sympathy.

Here have been given three tests of this quality in yourself. Write these three, then devise seven more situations calling for sympathetic treatment, and condense them until you have conveyed that *impression* of sympathetic emotion in the briefest and most effective manner of which you are capable.

Humor

All these qualities, creativeness, observation, imagination, democracy, sympathy, must be tempered by humor.

A sense of humor is the foundation of all optimism. A sense of humor is the universal solvent of human emotion. A sense of humor is the touch-stone which renders the most puzzling of human problems understandable; but it is also a thing which is born and can never be acquired. If you have not the gift you might just as well never try to obtain it. If you have it count yourself blest, but *be careful of its use*. You can make yourself most absurd with a lack of discretion in this particular.

In more serious work the value of humor is in the making of contrast.

Two men in a room confront each other. One has a revolver in his hand, the other is entirely at his mercy.

"Quickly!" says the man with the revolver. "Walk across to that window and wave your handkerchief, or I shall fire!"

"Fire, then," says the younger and sligher of the two.

It is a tense moment. They glare into each other's eyes, and in neither man is there any sign of weakening. Then suddenly a hoarse voice at the window croaks:

"Fire! Fire! O, fireman, save my child!"

It is a green parrot hanging in a cage. In spite of the grave matter at issue between them smiles flit across the faces of both men. The absurd incongruity of the interruption appeals to the sense of humor in each one, and for a moment the tension is relaxed. The older and darker man is the first to strive to regain it. He tries to bend his previous inflexible sternness of gaze upon his opponent, but the chattering bird, once started, keeps up its irrelevant screaming, and the tension definitely breaks.

"Come," appeals the younger man, after the parrot has quieted down; "let us sit here and look at this thing from another angle."

From that point on the situation may have a dozen different terminations, a score of them, a hundred; but the point has passed where any interjected remark by the parrot can have a humorous significance. The next one, no matter how irrelevant, would have a tragic significance in the story. Imagine the effect if the next absurd phrase should be croaked while the younger man lay dead! Part of the absurdity of the original interruption came in its unexpectedness, and about humor there is nearly always that quality. Its largest value in your own work will come about through its unexpected occurrence to you as you proceed with your construction. Very few good humorous situations are deliberately built. They just happen. As for straight humorous writing, there is no need to analyze it or even discuss it here. Born humorists need no instruction, and the other kind need not try.

Industry

I have placed this last for emphasis—the ability to work and keep on working, even after you think that you have passed the limit of endurance. There is no permanent success to be achieved in any line without *work*, and particularly is this true of authorship. To begin with, assuming always that you are to make your own way from the start—and every worth-while career is so sustained—you will have some bread-winning occupation which will leave you tired when your drudging hours are over. Social attractions will take up some of your spare time, and so, right in the very beginning, what literary labor you do will be performed in hours that are stolen from rest and recreation and sleep. This reason alone keeps in eighteen-dollar-a-

week grooves, for a lifetime, many men eminently fitted for success in writing. The disheartening part is that your first efforts will doubtless be unsuccessful; that night after night and morning after morning must be given up for a year, for two years, for three years, possibly, to toil that seems fruitless. This does not sound so much of a hardship until you try it; until the days of discouragement come; until all your efforts, applauded by your friends, are scorned by the only critics worth while—those who would actually buy your material and pay real money for it. The only course to take in such cases is to work! When discouragement comes, work! When you are tired out, and sick even of your ambition, work! When the temptation comes to slip back into the rut, to drift along with the lazy tide, rouse yourself and work! I do not very much believe in the genius of inspiration. I thoroughly believe in an adaptability and a natural liking for a pursuit, and then in work, work, work! Not work by fits of sudden enthusiasm, but steady, all-the-year-round work! Nothing but work!

And that is the royal path to success. Other people have said this so often and in so many ways that it seems trite and stale, but *I mean it!* I have passed through the grind, and I know. (Lay aside idle planning and dreaming, and WORK!)

The Business Story

Unless you are strong enough to create the fashions, follow them, for stories change fashion from year to year as markedly as do clothes. As you will see, if you keep understandingly in touch with the current magazines, the story which to-day has precedence over all others in popular demand is the business story. The same thrill which used to characterize stories of adventure, the same intensity, the same struggle to win now appears just as effectively and picturesquely in depicting the commercial and political battles of this financial age. If you know anything worth telling about the conduct of any business, if you have any fertility in plot and facility in character-drawing, you may combine those requisites in a story which will have a better chance of acceptance than any tearful tale of Philip and

his Chloe. The strategies of finance, high and low, frenzied and frapped; the romance of millions, and how they were made or stolen; the Titanic battles of the kings of commerce; the ambitions and struggles and final triumphs of the butcher, the baker, and candlestick-maker; the daily affairs of the "tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, apothecary, plow-boy, thief," these and their service in the cause of the Great God Success are the things which interest the live public of to-day.

To write a business story you must know intimately of business detail. A knowledge of the mere outward detail is scarcely enough. You must know not only the minute method of procedure in the particular line of business which you are handling, but you must know the spirit and mental attitude of the men who conduct that business, for in no class of story can you make a more absurd failure than in this, if you are not thoroughly posted. To write a brokerage story and have brokers say that you must have worked in a broker's office, to write a mercantile story and have merchants say

you must have worked in a store, to write manufacturing stories and have manufacturers say that you must have worked in a factory, with knowledge of the inside manipulative conditions of each of these, is to be successful. Anything else spells failure. Experience is necessary in this line. You can not invent business conditions, business knowledge, or business detail, and without much contact with business men, in their business life, you are quite likely to misunderstand their attitude and action in business deals. Having the experience, this is the most prolific field of all for the modern writer, for it covers the subject which the large mass of the American public has most at heart. Even women to-day read business stories with avidity.

The materials lie everywhere. The story of how Hiram Jones bought Ezra Tidball's successful Dry Goods and Notions Emporium at Hick's Mills Cross Roads and made a failure of it, or took over the unsuccessful Emporium and made a success of it, or "euchered" Ezra out of it, or was cleverly foiled in the attempt, is likely to prove just.

as good fiction material as the consolidation of all the railroads in the world. In either event there might be a more or less perfunctory love-story interwoven, and there should also be some problem involving business honor. Despite the general impression to the contrary, among people who talk merely for conversation's sake, there is, throughout the entire United States, a keen awakening of business honor; and this notwithstanding that business affairs have never been so shrewdly conducted. The line between business trickery and business cleverness, however, is quite sharply drawn, and it is at the crossing of this line that the most dramatic business stories will be found.

The Political Story

Here again absolute knowledge must be had, or your stories will be both silly and absurd, and people who are posted will know it. The newspapers are full of political charge and counter-charge, and they furnish a wealth of material in the way of incident, most of it exaggerated, but a great deal of it containing much truth. Many of these incidents are elaborate enough upon which to build a thoroughly satisfactory plot, but neither incident nor plot are sufficient, no matter how complete, without an intimate knowledge of the class of men concerned. Both the reformer and the grafter are rich material, but they must be understood, and to understand them they must be known. The reformer is easier to comprehend, for his leading motive coincides with

the code of ethics which we have all been taught. He possesses a trace of fanaticism which often renders him absurd, but when he is free from this absurdity and possesses ability he is a clean-cut, vigorous man of great dramatic value. The grafter, on the other hand, without an intimate acquaintance with his motives, is well nigh incomprehensible. It must be remembered that in most cases he justifies himself, to himself at least, for all his acts; that he does not imagine himself to be a moral leper; that he has both actual and fancied virtues upon which he prides himself very highly, and that he stoutly contends even to himself, in the final analysis, that he is an admirable man.

It does not matter whether you agree with him in this estimate or not. It is not your province to editorialize in a story. You must present the man as he is. If the man's purposes and methods must be disapproved, so construct your story that the reader will furnish the disapproval. Never call your villain a villain. Present his villainous act or his villainous speech without

comment and without indignant coloring, just as the act presumably happened or the speech was presumably spoken, and do not overdraw either one. Your audience will very quickly decide his character if you have drawn him correctly, and they will not thank you for having left them no room for the exercise of their own intelligence. For the same reason it is not wise to call your hero noble upon every page, nor your humorous character funny, nor your disagreeable woman sour.

Material for political stories will be found everywhere, from the rural district to the city, from ward to national politics, and if well drawn they are always interesting and always salable. Experience, again it must be insisted upon, is absolutely requisite, however, in the handling of these stories, and without that intimate knowledge they had best be let severely alone.

The Detective Story

One enters the realms of fancy, now, and more latitude for divergence from truth is permitted here by custom than in the two classes of stories above named. It is quite likely that the true detective story has not yet been written. Nearly all of them which have found vogue are most radical distortions, and appeal to the reader not from their probability, but from their ingenuity. Sherlock Holmes, to cite an instance, is a purely imaginative creature, the like of whom has never existed, and probably never will exist, and he is as far from the truth as those diverting thieves, Raffles and Arsene Lupin. Exaggerated character drawings, however, are, by custom, allowable throughout in stories of this kind, and they are even recommended as heightening the color.

These and all other mystery stories are

almost necessarily written backwards; that is, the solution of the puzzling situation must be known in advance by the writer, and the developments which lead up to the solution carefully worked out, so that concealment is maintained until the very end. If the writer begins with a mystery unsolvable to himself, and constructs a story about this, finally working out a solution, he is furnishing the intelligence of his reader with the same basis for deduction as himself, and his denouement will be anticipated. On the other hand, if the creation of the story is started with the solution fixed firmly in mind, it is possible to baffle the reader from beginning to end, while still holding his piqued interest and attention, which is fully as essential as endless ingenuity of plot.

There is an excellent market for this type of story if it is cleverly written, and no very deep knowledge of criminology seems requisite, to judge from certain commercially successful examples, although a mastery of criminal court proceedings and police routine should be had. At least two women have been quite facile in this line, but in the

work of both of them the lack of knowledge of criminal character is conspicuous, and makes their creations of necessity ephemeral. More accurate knowledge might give them a more permanent value. Permanent fame, however, is reserved for the writer—and he will almost of necessity be a man, since only a man can have a properly intimate acquaintance with his types—who will pen the story of actual modern detective work, filled with brilliant character drawings of criminals as they actually are and detectives as they really exist, and with plot and incident as they might with exact probability occur. These will be brutal stories and sordid, but they will be full of fighting and red blood and virility and thrilling situations and dramatic climaxes. There will not be in them so much keen mental deduction as there will be physical supremacy, and once they have their vogue established, they will command a high price. Truth always does.

Stories for Children

There is nothing so difficult to write, and which pays so little in monetary returns, considering the amount of labor and talent required, as stories for children. The gift of writing them acceptably is a very rare one, and people are more often mistaken in their ability in this line than in any other. It seems a simple thing to do, but it is not. In the first place, few people understand the processes of a child's mind, and in the endeavor to write down to their comprehension insult their intelligence. So many people forget, or never seem to have comprehended, that children, in mental fiber, in observation, in comprehension, and in reasoning power, are precisely like their elders, with the sole exception of lacking experience upon which to base their deductions. Most of the attempts to appeal to

the intelligence of children are utterly silly. There is nothing truer than that men are but children of a larger growth, but the converse is equally true. A few writers have realized this, and have appealed, soberly and with splendid success, directly to the child intelligence as if it were grown up, being only careful to use an easy range of vocabulary, ideas which can come within the range of child experience, and plot and incident which are free from the need of maturity. Love, for instance, may be between the sexes, but must be absolutely sexless.

An immoral lesson or an immoral deduction must, of course, never be possible, but neither is it necessary to try, in every page, to cram a moral preachment down the throats of poor, badgered infants, who must listen, every day of their lives, to wearisome sermons from some one or the other of many misguided acquaintances. If you had to endure, throughout every revolution of the earth upon its axis, to have some three or four people solemnly warn you to be good, you would become tired, by and by,

of being naturally good because you were born that way and because your natural instincts set in that direction, and be tempted, merely out of self-assertiveness, to be bad. It is quite possible to convey good moral lessons without being so infernally obvious about it. Happily the spasm is passing in which it was considered immoral to tell children fairy stories. Their imaginations are fully as keen as ours, and need food just as their bodies do, and it is most comforting to run across a tale now and then which is meant merely to amuse them and to engage their fancies. About once in a generation a Frank L. Baum arises to bless the children, and is richly rewarded, but, like the writer of humor, he is born, not made. If you have inclinations in that direction, you might try. You can never know whether or not you have a gift until you put it to the test.

The writing of stories for the very young has, however, one very valuable feature for all beginners. Several writers whom I know had their earliest literary practice upon the writing of children's stories, and were com-

elled thereby to seek simplicity of language. It becomes necessary to use as many words of one syllable as possible, never to use a three-syllable word where a two-syllable word will do, and never to use a word of more than three syllables at all. It would seem at the first glance that this would hamper expression. On the contrary, it is a vast aid to it. Let us examine a sample paragraph.

“At the close of day the man stood on the top of the hill, a black blot against the red rim of the sun. The cold wind of the night blew upon him from out the icy north. Looking down on the far-off city which he had just left for all time, he hid his face in his hands and sobbed.”

You will find, upon glancing over these sentences, which are taken from no story whatever, but which might well serve as the introduction to one, that out of sixty-two words, all but six consist of one syllable, while the six exceptions are extremely simple words; yet I do not believe that any more vivid picture could be constructed with all the polysyllabled Latin derivatives

in the world. I would not counsel any one to attempt to found his style upon Addison or Steele or any other writer living or dead, but I would counsel long and painstaking practice in the art of writing in simple words. You are compelled by this to directness of speech and clearness of idea. You are bound to gain force by it. If you have thoroughly grounded yourself in this practice, you need the style of no other man from which to copy. Afterwards you may take liberties with your self-imposed restrictions; may allow yourself as wide a choice as you like, but always those fundamentals of directness and clarity will be the basis of your work, and you can not go far wrong. For this reason I would commend the writing of stories for young children. If you can secure the opportunity to edit or write a child's page for some newspaper for a year or two, take it at any price. Your gain in simplicity of expression will be worth an incalculable price to you in after years, if you take up writing as a permanent profession.

As has been pointed out, this is not a

paying branch. Commercial reasons are behind this. Most of the children's pages in the newspapers are supplied by syndicates which provide the entire pages, including the illustrations, very cheaply, sometimes for as low as three dollars a week, furnishing the same material to a great many papers. They do not pay high prices to their writers because there are so many of them, girls and beginners who do not expect much for their labor. There are but very few children's magazines, and these are unable to pay large prices because they find it impossible to secure much advertising for their pages. Children are not buyers of merchandise to any large extent, and the older people, as a rule, see their advertisements in other places.

So far we have discussed only stories for the very young, but magazine and Sunday newspaper stories for youths of from twelve to eighteen do not offer a much better market, the same reasons prevailing. Stories of this type for book publication, however, are more worth while from a monetary standpoint, as witness the books of Henty, Louisa

M. Alcott, and others. Such books are usually written in series, and comprise, for boys, tales of clean adventure in which the manly qualities of courage and honesty have a prominent part; and for girls, home or school stories in which the counter-balancing feminine virtues have an equally important place. In both of these the action must be constant, for the minds of the young are eager and restless as much so as their bodies, and require constant change.

While very exceptional talent in this line will reap a satisfactory commercial reward, the same amount of effort and ability, if spent upon general fiction, will pay much better. It will not be for you to choose, however. You will discover, eventually, that you can write some things much better than others. When you find that branch of work, unless you are one gifted with a universality of genius, stick to it and develop it to your highest power, *and at the same time develop your market*. Concentration here, as in every other line of business in the world, will achieve a most comfortable and satisfying success.

Stories About Children

Stories about children, for "grown-ups" to read, fall into an entirely different class from those above, and for these stories, well written, there is always a most eager demand. Josephine Dodge Daskam, George Madden Martin, Myra Kelly, and others, have attained both fame and competence in this line, and the fundamental feature of their work has been that it is true to all childhood. They have penetrated and understood the minds and hearts of children, not to appeal to them, but to appeal to others who know and understand. Almost any bright child may form the basis of such portraiture. It must be borne in mind, however, that here, as in all other classes of fiction-writing, stories do not come to your hand ready-made. They are imperfect, as you find them in real life, and your observa-

tion and experience can only give you the germ of the stories and the character-drawing. The stories themselves must be developed from the material you find, and the same rules which apply to other story construction apply here. There must be a beginning, a purpose, and a climax.

Stories of Adventure

This is a class of story which will never die, and its range is as wide as the globe itself. Even in the meekest and the mildest of us there exists at least the rudiments of a desire to wander forth into the unknown, to do battle, and to conquer, and if we can not do this in the tender flesh, we insist upon doing it in the hardy imagination. Good, stirring stories of adventure excite and still satisfy the wanderlust of most of us. No hard and fast rule can be laid down for this class of story, for it is of endless variety. Wherever circumstance or environment may be devised that fearless men may venture into danger and peerless women may be rescued, there will be found the materials, and truth may put the cover upon her well and rest a while. Only be

careful that one thrill treads sharply upon the heels of another, that your heroine be as good as she is beautiful, your hero without a trace of fear, and your villain remorselessly blood-thirsty, and you may wander at will in the realms of your fancy to devise enough violent deeds for them to do. The locale may be in a city, a village, or a forest; on sea, in a mine, or in an airship; at the equator or the north pole, in Japan or Africa or America, in the past, the present, or the future, or in all of these, bearing always in mind, above everything, that you must have swift and continuous action and high moral purpose; for there is nothing cleaner in all the realms of literary composition than the morals of your slashing melodrama. To that writer who can devise a new setting for the old elements of adventure stories there awaits laurels of gold which can be coined into abundant dollars.

The Love-Story

In no line of fiction is the tremendous change in public taste shown more than in what is known as the straight love-story. In the old type love was a strange, abstract sort of creation with every hint of sex carefully eliminated, though it was the be all and end all of the living world. Impossible men wooed impossible maidens through long chapters devoted for the most part to poetic description. An entire page was given up to describing the sunny day in June in which the story opened, and the remaining pages told how the birds flitted in the trees and the butterflies hovered over the flowers; how the breezes, straying from far-off meadows and laden with the fragrance of new-mown hay, stirred gently the locks of the fair-haired maiden in the garden plucking

roses. End of first chapter. Chapter two was devoted entirely to a description of the fair-haired maiden; her lips, her eyes, her alabaster brow, and every part of her visible perfections were carefully catalogued and indexed until, at the close of the chapter, He, astride a prancing charger, dismounted at the gate. He was sometimes rich and sometimes poor, but necessarily honest. There was a rich and necessarily dishonest man, considerably older and invariably of a dark complexion, who wanted to marry her, and who was favored by her parents. Need we say, dear reader, that after much trial and tribulation and heart-breaking sorrow and sickness-unto-death, the rich but dishonest man was proved a villain and she married *Him*? Last of all, after the story was all over, there was a description of the bridal garments and the name of the hymn which was played as they walked up the aisle of the church, in full view, as they passed the window, of the villain's shining tombstone. About the only divergence ever permissible in this class of stories was in the names of the characters.

Plot, incident, and character-drawing were almost identical.

The modern straight love-story scarcely exists, but love is still with us, as potent as it was when it first rolled forth from chaos, and in a story its presence is nearly always necessary. In most cases, however, it is only elementary and incidental, being admitted as a leading motive, but giving way in interest of detail to the absorbing action which grows out of it or revolves about it. Men are ready to do battle and to die for love just as promptly as ever, if need be, but the condition is recognized in its truer relation to life. Nearly always the love-story of today is written with a frank recognition, though by no means always expressed, of the sex relation. It is taken for granted that two given persons are more in harmony with each other psychologically, physiologically, mentally, and spiritually than either of these same two persons would be with any other person. In this attitude there has been no change since civilization recognized the right of a woman to mutual choice, but, nevertheless, love as the lead-

ing incident of a story has been well nigh discarded. It becomes the motive, mostly in the background, upon which all other incidents are hinged and to which they refer. The explanation is very simple, though the principles have not changed. Men do not neglect their business because they are in love, but they succeed in it to prove to the woman of their choice their prowess and so to win her admiration, precisely as the knights of old used to go out before breakfast and kill an enemy or so, to lay the captured arms and accoutrement at the feet of their ladies; only business does not seem so romantic as fighting, and it takes more space and prominence to arouse interest.

The girl of the modern story is as different from the girl of the early story as a modern girl is different from the early girl, or, in fact, as modern times are different from early times. She is healthy of mind and body. She is not innocent in the old-time sense of being ignorant, and above all she is independent, all facts which have been so many death-blows to the old-time twaddler. The girl in the old-time love-story was

exaggerated from the models that the writer saw around him, and carried to the Nth degree of what he thought a clinging vine ought to be like. Women read these stories and sighed and wept over them, and what influence they had upon heredity, heaven only knows. Happily we have outgrown them. The girls in the stories of to-day are drawn, as are all other characters and incidents, from actual life, idealized but slightly, and they have infinitely more naturalness and charm and winsomeness.

This branch of the work is so persistently dwelt upon here because, with the very young and consequently with every amateur, the love-story, as a rule, follows immediately upon those early attempts at poetry in which every line is very carefully begun with a capital letter and in which the last word of each second and fourth line is most painstakingly rhymed. When we come to have a dim perception that perhaps Tennyson, through some intangible reason or other, had a trifle the advantage of us, we turn to prose, and what more natural than the transition to poetic prose? It is the springtime

of life with us, when birds twitter and flowers bloom and morning skies blush red, and all because love is in the world. Perhaps those strangely stilted creatures who did nothing all day long but fall in love and stay in love from preface to finis, who talked love and plotted love, dreamed love and thought love, and all but ate and drank it through the pages of the long since forgotten Godey's Ladies' Magazine, owed their being to the fact that American literature itself was then quite young. To-day, in the dawning maturity of Western letters, all is changed. Once in a decade, perhaps, there is published a strong and worth-while tale of love which wades seas and scales mountains, but for the most part this vast main-spring of human motive and action is crowded into its case with the other cogs and pinion wheels that go to make up the general largeness of life.

To tell the truth, editors do not particularly care for love-stories, especially of the variety that is likely to be turned out by the young. They know, and writers who have trod the thorny path which leads to suc-

cess know, that this sort of tale is the most difficult of all to write, and that the happy medium between the mawkish sentimentality of puppy love and the perfectly frigid attitude of those who marry because two can live cheaper than one, is most difficult to obtain. It is better by far to leave love-stories alone, unless one happens to have a special gift for them. In that case no contrary advice will hurt, because the gifted one will pay no attention to it, but "will follow his natural bent, even as you and I."

The obvious stories, based upon the every-day comedy and tragedy about you, with love perhaps as a background motive, allow me to repeat, are better. Some day, when maturity comes, when you can study this great emotion and passion in its true relations, when you have attained facility as a writer, you may perhaps write the great love-story, but until then practice upon something you can comprehend.

The Historical Story

This is the sugar, or salt, or other staple commodity, of the story-telling and story-selling trade. It is dear to our souls, it warms the cockles of our hearts, this swash-buckling old friend of ours. Occasionally the writers of historical stories spend much time and research to rehabilitate a by-gone period, to reproduce it in all the finery and charm that perspective lends it, and to make it an accurate picture of the past, but with all their labor it becomes, in fact, merely but a background upon which to hang stirring romance and adventure, and what was said in relation to stories of adventure consequently applies here. There is no question that the historical setting gives to such stories the enhancement of color, but if attempted they should be as near historically accurate as patient research can make them. A few mere "gadzooks" and "godswounds"

will not take the place of this care in making anything like permanent success. For the balance the same rule applies to the construction of these stories as to the construction of all others. They must have a central theme, carried out to a logical conclusion, and the character-drawing must be true, not necessarily to the period so much as to all humanity, its motives and its emotions, its aims and ambitions, and its strivings for a higher level. For myself, the writing of a historical story does not attract me. I prefer the incidents and the people whom I find dwelling near me, whom I meet in clubs and hotels and in the parlors of my friends, whom I see upon the streets of my own city, on railway trains, and in distant places, and it seems to me that if one can write truthfully and well of these familiar things, if he can reflect with fidelity the animating spirit, the customs, and the everyday life of his own time, he will be writing the true historical story; that is, the story which in the future shall be regarded as of value and interest for its historical fidelity, in addition to its interest as an episode in the never-ending drama of the human soul.

Dialect Stories

Whatever else you do, be careful of dialect. Mere "freak" spelling by no means makes dialect, which is the easiest of all things to overdo. It should only be used where absolutely necessary, and then with the utmost caution. Every phonetically spelled word which deviates from the normal should be said aloud and listened to with a trained ear, to make sure that it represents exactly the required sound. Discard nearly all of the conventionally misspelled and frequently used words which have come to represent Irish, German, Hebrew, Negro, and other racial speeches. In the ordinary "comic dialect," in nine cases out of ten, these are more or less absurd exaggerations. Unless you are thoroughly familiar with Negro character and have been in close and

intimate enough contact with these half childlike, half savage people to know perfectly their modes of speech—and thought—do not, in the name of all consistency and logic and sanity, attempt to write Negro dialect. The same applies to all other like cases. Dialect is seldom necessary to the sustainment of the *human interest* of a story, and the color it adds is better left out unless it is well done.

Where one succeeds in dialect work, a thousand fail. It requires a very musical ear to detect and analyze the variation in the pronunciation of words which makes dialect, and it requires an intimate knowledge of every living and thinking habit of the race or district under consideration to know the characteristic words in use; and this, after all, is not only the live spirit of dialect, but its main divergence, even more important than mere differences of pronunciation. Unless you are sure that you can do these things in absolute perfection, let them entirely alone and turn your attention to something else.

Stories Not to be Written

Avoid, by all means, the morbid and the gruesome. There is no demand for them. It is doubtful if Poe could to-day place in a good, well-paying market his marvelous stories. As a nation we want and demand cheerfulness.

Last, but not least, avoid the salacious and the impure as you would poison. Aside from the moral aspect, there is no money in this sort of writing, notwithstanding the tremendous success of "Three Weeks," which at the time of penning this treatise is the latest notable putrescence to assail the nostrils of the reading public. Where one story of this sort succeeds, innumerable others fail, and justly so. After all we are a wholesome people; perhaps none more so in the world. Moreover, while a success of this sort might be possible in a book, in a magazine it is entirely out of the question. No magazine which will pay worth-while prices

will purchase stories of this type. Let them alone entirely. Do not allow yourself to run away with the idea that they are artistic. The most artistic things in the world are the cleanest. The time has gone by when it was considered that artists, musical composers, and authors must necessarily be of unclean lives or of unclean thought. The most successful artists in every line to-day, and those the artistic excellence of whose work most deserves success, are the cleanest of habit and of mind, and if you want to court professional failure and personal misery, try deviation from the wholesome principles of right living and right thinking taught in the Bible or in any other code of ethics upon which a great and permanent religion has been founded. I speak this not as one who would preach, but as a practical man who has seen nearly all modes of life, and whose judgment, which he feels to be not entirely an unripe one, has picked out positively the best; and remember that, no matter how painstakingly you try to disguise it, your true self will show through your writing.

Construction

A short story can not attempt to take in the entire scope of a novel, nor could any good novel be shorn of its extraneous matter and condensed into the compass of a short story. A novel may comprise in its pages the detailed history of a lifetime, the growth and disintegration of a nation, the improvement or retrogression of a world. The short story must be confined to a single incident. A short story should be to the novel what a song is to an opera. Sometimes the song may be better than the whole balance of the opera which contained it, and may be remembered longer. A novel may be roughly compared to a landscape painting in which a beautiful tree is the most important figure, and the short story would, following the analogy, be a painting of the tree itself. The whole import of the book

"Ben Hur" could not be compressed into the limits of a short story, but the chariot race of Ben Hur, with some trifling work to remodel the rough edges where it has been torn from its setting, would make a magnificent short story. Get this difference fixed clearly in your mind before you attempt to write. You must have one clearly defined episode about which everything must center. The plot may be as elaborate as you like, but never for one moment may you forget that it must all revolve about or lead up to a single climax. Minor episodes, it is true, it may have in plenty, but these must never be used unless they are illustrative of or contributory to the main episode.

It is only within the last two or three decades that this really new phase of literary accomplishment has developed to its present pre-eminence. The short story in its modern development is an entirely distinct creation, differing as much from the early efforts of Boccaccio and his ilk as the verse of Kipling differs from the epics of Homer. There is no ground of comparison because they are of an entirely different

genus. It is as H. H. Wells put it, when asked to decide which he thought the better of two excellent but entirely dissimilar stories.

"It is absurd," he said. "It is like asking me which I like the better; butter or but-tercups."

The early short story was the narration of a mere passing incident, the event of a day or a night. It was only the part of a story. The modern short story has a beginning, a purpose, and a climax. It comprises within its brief expanse clean, clear character-drawing, and may, like the novel, cover the entire career and purpose of a lifetime, but, unlike the novel, it must convey the *impression* of this lifetime through the illustrative episode which forms the entire backbone of the story. The modern development has action, description, and logical construction, and all the elements which used to make the successful old-fashioned novel, but made tense and terse by the elimination of all but one illuminative climax.

In your early practice skeletonize your story. Think it over well and shear of all

its extraneous and contributory phases the dramatic or other episode which is to be your climax. Express this on paper in as few terse words as possible. Add to this, then, in brief, separate sentences the episodes which are to lead up to your climax. When you have a clear and definite understanding of what you are about to do, select the names of your characters and their scenic environment and invest them in your own mind with a living, breathing personality. Then start your story. If you invest your characters with this personality before you have studied well the construction, the people whom you have created will take the bit in their teeth, will run away with your story, and destroy your theme. Incidentally they may make a better story out of it than you would have done, but this will scarcely happen in your earlier efforts.

The Beginning

Having selected your story and being quite sure that you have a story to tell, proceed as an old newspaper man once told me was the proper way to write news items. Begin in the middle, and write both ways. By that it is meant that you must make some almost startlingly interesting statement at the beginning of your story. Make your first page, your first paragraph, your first sentence, your first words, if possible, so absorbing that they will force the attention of the reader, and carry it through to the end of what you have to say. The trick is comparatively simple. Do *not* write an introduction.

By way of illustration I am going to present the beginning of a half dozen of my own stories. It might have been more modest to select those of other writers, to give you examples from Poe and Hawthorne,

from Flaubert and De Maupassant, from O. Henry and Robert W. Chambers, but, after all, I am much more familiar with my own work, and it follows, too, as nearly as I can make it, the principles in which I firmly believe.

To begin with, here follow the first three hundred and eighty-nine words of the manuscript of "Selling a Patent," one of a series of the adventures of one J. Rufus Wallingford which were first published in the "Saturday Evening Post" and afterwards incorporated into a book under the title of "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford."

A fussy little German, in very new looking clothes which fitted him almost like tailor-made, rushed back to the gates of the train-shed, where the conductor stood with his eyes fixed intensely upon his watch, his left hand poised ready to wave.

"I left my umbrella," spluttered the passenger.

"No time," declared the autocrat, not gruffly or unkindly, but in a tone of virtuous devotion to duty.

The little German's eyes glared through his spectacles, his face puffed red, his gray mustache bristled.

"But it's my wife's umbrella!" he urged, as if that might make a difference.

The brass-buttoned slave to duty did not even smile. He raised his hand, and in a moment more the potent turn of his wrist would have sent Number Eighteen plunging on her westward way. In that moment, however, the Pullman conductor, waiting with him, clutched the blue arm of authority.

"Hold her a second," he advised, with his thumb pointed far up the platform. "Here comes from a dollar up for everybody. He's rode with me before."

The captain of Eighteen gave a swift glance and was satisfied.

"Sure. I know him," he said of the newcomer, then he turned to the still desperately hopeful passen-

ger and relented. "Run!" he directed briefly.

The gentleman who has secured for Carl Klug this boon, merely by an opportune arrival, was not hurrying. He was too large a man to hurry, so a depot porter was doing it for him. The porter plunged on in advance, springing heavily from one bent leg to the other, weighted down with a hat box in one hand, a huge Gladstone bag in the other, and a suit case under each arm. The perspiration was streaming down his face, but he was quite content. Behind him stalked J. Rufus Wallingford, carrying only a cane and gloves; but more, for him, would have seemed absurd, for when he moved the background seemed to advance with him, he was so broad of shoulder and of chest and of mid-girth. Dignity radiated from his frame and carriage, good humor from his big face, wealth from every line and crease

of his garments, and it was no matter for wonder that even the rigid schedule of Number Eighteen was glad to extend to this master of circumstances its small fraction of elasticity.

In this space, which was the beginning of a story running to the unusually cumbersome length of twenty thousand words, five clearly defined character portraits are suggested: the German passenger, a train conductor, a Pullman conductor, a depot porter, and J. Rufus Wallingford, who is the central figure of the story. The German is the man whom Wallingford proceeds to rob of his patent on a sales-recording device; but three of the characters—the train crew—never appear again; and while these are graphically enough pictured, close analysis will show that they are not as carefully drawn as the two leading characters. They are only described as to the general characteristics of conductors and porters, being left indefinite as to facial and bodily characteristics so that the reader may form his own pictures of them. To have

described them more accurately would have been to have fixed them too firmly in the minds of readers; they would then have remained in the memory and have excited a lingering wonder as to when they would appear again.

In this beginning action is started at once. The picture is one that has life and motion. Moreover, the background is one with which nearly all people are familiar. There is a hint, too, that the man Wallingford is a "smooth" individual, and not overly scrupulous.

Let us go over the first paragraph again:

A fussy little German, in very new looking clothes which fitted him almost like tailor-made, rushed back to the gates of the train-shed, where the conductor stood with his eyes fixed intently on his watch, his left hand poised ready to wave.

At the very outset and within a few words two characters and immediate action are introduced, and the reader is interested at once, if he is going to be interested at all.

The next example is the beginning of a story called "Skeezicks," published in "McClure's Magazine:"

"Does Master Charles Edward Freeman, Esquire, live here?" politely asked Uncle Joe, pausing in mock hesitation.

The small boy on the gate-post, who had been idly drumming his heels against the smooth wood, at once checked back his smile of greeting, ready for any amount of serious pretense.

"Yes, sir," he answered, with equally grave courtesy.

"And is the gentleman at home?" Uncle Joe was anxious to know.

"No, sir," replied the boy, not even the suspicion of twinkle in his inscrutable eyes.

"No?" inquired the young man in surprise. "It's really too bad that he is away, for I wished to see him on rather particular business *not* unconnected with chocolate creams. Please tell him that

I called, will you?" And Uncle Joe slowly moved on.

That broke the combination.

"Uncle Joe!" cried an eager voice, childish this time and quite unlike the one that had been used up to this point. "Come back, Uncle Joe! I'm Charles Edward Freeman, but really and truly I'm not at home, you know, because I'm right here on the gate-post." This with a gleeful laugh.

Uncle Joe returned, but unconvinced.

"You do n't mean to claim that *you* are Master Charles Edward Freeman, Esquire, do you?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir." The boy was again gravity itself.

"Nonsense! Why, it's quite impossible. Charles Edward Freeman is a regular six-foot-two name, with a plug hat and a cane and other trimmings. I'm certain you're not six foot two. Jump

down here and let me measure you."

The entire whimsical nature of what is to follow is foreshadowed in these paragraphs, and two of the three main characters are introduced at once.

The next example is from "The Strike Breaker," also published in "McClure's:"

Young Tremont paused to light a cigar, but, as he did so, he cast a quick glance down the dark alley opposite which he stood. It was just as well to be cautious. At first the alley-way seemed empty, but as the match flared up and the end of his Havana caught the fire, a rough figure came from behind the big telephone pole. Instantly Tremont dropped his hands into his overcoat pockets. As the figure came toward him, the muzzles of two concealed hammerless pistols were pointing straight at it, a cool finger on each trigger.

Again, *in the first paragraph*, a background picture, a hint of character-drawing,

and action, *always action*. In this, too, observe that in very few words the reader is given a distinct imagery of the surroundings. Read it over and you will see that there is no description whatever. There is a mere mention of a dark alley mouth with a telephone pole in it, and yet I venture to say that after the reading of that paragraph you had a vivid mental picture of the entire scene. The point is that only the impression of the scene was given and you supplied all the missing details from your own imagination and your own memory of such localities.

Below is the first paragraph of "Move On," a story published in "Munsey's:"

Along about midnight, a man with his head bent and his shoulders huddled against the biting cold, turned from the railroad track and limped painfully back to the brickyard, where the smoke from thick, squat chimneys glowed red and promised warmth. As he entered the lane of sheds he saw a lantern come swinging up from the

other end, and hid himself in the shadow of a pile of clay-hung lumber. The watchman stalked by, whistling cheerfully. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the vagrant as the gleam of the lantern flashed upon him, but he paid no attention; he did not want to see the man. He was a big, bluff, hearty fellow who had known cold nights himself.

Here is the same principle; to begin precisely as if the reader were familiar with all the preceding circumstances, to leave out all the uninteresting details, and to proceed at once with the groundwork of the story. In other words, your characters are introduced at a moment when they are already in action, and the story is under way at the moment you meet them.

Next follows the beginning of "Fanchon The Lobster," published in the "Saturday Evening Post," a story of entirely different type from any of the others, but introducing the two leading characters, Pierre Piquard

and the remarkable lobster, and both in action:

Oh, it was an admirable lobster! Excellent! Per-fect! Pierre Piquard gesticulated with joy, both plump, white hands clasped before his throat, even while Francois gesticulated with pain. There had been other lobsters which had arrived sturdily protesting after their long and tiresome journey from the east, but none with the tremendous vitality—and spirit!—of this one. The moment Francois, used to the feeble and sluggish movements of the creatures, had thrust down his hand, there came a swift movement and click, and behold, from one lean finger of the dancing Francois dangled the entire weight of the beast!

The beginning of "The Making of Bobby Burnit," published as a series of stories in the "Saturday Evening Post," afterwards as a connected book, and then turned into a

play, is slightly different because it introduces a character who, though one of the leading personages in the "cast," is dead before the story begins. It is attempted in this, however, to present an interesting and unusual situation in the very first paragraph, and the manner in which "Bobby" has been accepted by the public would lead to the belief that this was accomplished.

"I am profoundly convinced that my son is a fool," read the will of old John Burnit. "I am, however, also convinced that I allowed him to become so, by too much absorption in my own affairs and too little in his, and, therefore, his being a fool is hereditary; consequently I feel it my duty, first: to give him a fair trial at making his own way, and second: to place the balance of my fortune in such trust that he can not starve. The trusteeship is already created and the details are nobody's present business. My son Robert will take over The John Burnit Store and personally con-

duct it, as his only resource, without further question as to what else I may have left behind me. This is my last will and testament."

That is how cheerful Bobby Burnit, with no thought heretofore above healthy amusements and Agnes Elliston, suddenly became a business man, after having been raised to become the idle heir to about three million dollars. Of course, having no kith nor kin in all this wide world, he went immediately to consult Agnes. It is quite likely that if he had been supplied with dozens of uncles and aunts he would have gone first to Agnes anyhow, having a mighty regard for her keen judgment, even though her clear gaze rested now and then all too critically upon himself.

Practice beginnings conscientiously, and your time will not be wasted, for when you have a good beginning you are almost certain to build good stories.

Development

I have attempted to show that an introduction should, above all things, include in some way the idea of motion, and particularly visible motion; that the nature of the story should be foreshadowed in it, and that the plot should begin at once, without tedious explanation or description. The development of the story must proceed with equal swiftness. Bearing constantly in mind the climax which makes your story worth telling, proceed toward it as soon as you have your groundwork laid, your characters introduced, and the minor episodes relating to introduction out of the way. It is not meant that you should leave out all the interesting details which go to the making of color. Write these as fully as you like, remembering that it is always easier to cut out than to supply new material, but be very sure, in

your revision, that you do not let stand any color which clogs the definite onward sweep of your narrative.

Let me refer back to the tales of which the beginnings have been given in the preceding pages, in order to show how simple is the outline of a short story.

In "Selling a Patent," Mr. Wallingford persuades Mr. Klug that the way to sell a patent to a monopoly is to form a manufacturing company, and by competition compel the monopoly to buy him out. He joins with Mr. Klug in the forming of this company and immediately proceeds to bankrupt it, forcing all its property and other valuable considerations, including the patent, to a sheriff's sale, in which he buys up the patent for "a song," having previously arranged to sell it to the monopoly at a good price. That is the skeleton. The means he employed, the various people with whom he associated, are the details, but the detail is never allowed to overshadow the story, which ends precisely upon the climax of Wallingford's securing possession of the patent.

In "Skeezicks," through a whimsical con-

versation with Uncle Joe, Skee-zicks gains the idea of buying an engagement ring for a young lady of whom he thinks a great deal and with whom Uncle Joe is in love. Upon the eve of her departure for Europe, just as Uncle Joe is going to propose, he sees Skee-zicks' engagement ring, an imitation diamond, upon her finger. He has just met his rival coming away from the house and immediately jumps to the natural conclusion, upon which he remains silent. After she has gone away Skee-zicks inadvertently lets slip the fact of his purchase of the ring, and Uncle Joe follows the young lady upon the next train. The story ends with a telegram, presumably signed by Skee-zicks, which states that Uncle Joe is coming to trade rings. All there is to plot is told in the above sentences, but the story occupied an approximate seven thousand words in the telling. This was all color and contributory incident, every bit of which went toward the building up of the climax.

In "The Strike Breaker" the figure approaching Tremont in the dark is Lanigan, a striker who wants to come back to work

as a "scab," though he is an ardent union man, because his wife and boy are sick. Tremont accepts him gladly, since his fight against the strikers is likely to fail because he can not get a competent engineer. Lani-gan comes into the factory, which is practically in a state of siege, has his life heavily insured, becomes the backbone of Tremont's strike-breaking organization, and later, overcome by the thought of the want and misery which his action is causing the families of his brethren of the union ranks, resigns and goes out among the vengeful mob surrounding the factory to explain that he has quit. He is shot by an enemy in the crowd. The story ends abruptly upon the death of Lani-gan, it being told long previously that his wife and child are well provided for and have moved to the country, amid healthy surroundings. That story, as published, counted ten thousand words, a length seldom permitted by any magazine.

The next story, "Move On," is merely an episode wherein a man, reduced to the ranks of tramping because he is unable to find work within the scope of his ability, is com-

pelled to move on, though starving and half frozen, from city to village and from village to farm, and from farm back to village and city, the climax coming when at last, a miserable outcast, and most forbidding and repellant-looking, he finds the man who, in his rough way, takes pity on him and makes him a human being again. There is scarcely any trace of plot to this, and yet it required five thousand words to form sufficient contrast to make the climax of *rest* sufficiently strong.

In "Fanchon the Lobster," a tale of absurdity, the lobster is made a pet by Pierre Piquard. A fellow countryman insists upon having that lobster cooked for his dinner. He forcibly seizes it and plunges it in a pot of boiling water. Pierre, the chef, then, out of revenge, prepares a sauce for the lobster which makes the incontinent diner die of acute indigestion. The diner was a stranger, and Pierre paid his funeral expenses so that he might go out on splendid Sunday mornings and lay wreaths of water-cress upon the grave of Fanchon.

In "The Making of Bobby Burnit," Bobby

loses control of his father's business through a consolidation with a rival, a stock company being formed and Bobby being voted out of an influential position, or even dividends on his holdings, because, in his ignorance, he permitted his rival, who was also his father's old enemy, to obtain possession of a majority of stock. Afterwards, with the help of his trustee, who proves to be Agnes Elliston, the girl with whom he is in love, he is able to regain control. This sentence tells exactly what he did, but how he did it is the interesting part.

These brief examples are given to show the simplicity of plot to which a short story must necessarily be confined. If you have a story in mind, skeletonize it as briefly as these have been outlined before you begin; but it is not wise to attempt to minutely plan all the detail, for if you are fertile enough to write good stories at all, you will find that a curious psychological process begins almost as soon as you start to write; both your characters and your situations, more or less, act almost as if endowed with independent life and intelligence. They will ut-

terly refuse to follow the rigid lines you have laid down for them, and will work out side-plots and incidents and situations of their own.

Suppose your story to be precisely as the last one mentioned; how a young man lost his business through lack of knowledge of stock company manipulation, and how he regained it with the assistance of his "best girl." You will have a more or less definite idea of the exact steps by which this is to be done, but when you have finished your story you will find it entirely different, in the majority of cases, from the one you set out to write. You may have followed your skeleton exactly, but your detail will be very different from that which you intended, and if you are gifted at all in the writing way, the altered result will be much better than the original could have been.

The Ending

Above all things, quit when you are through. Stop exactly on your climax. If you deem it necessary to tell what became of your characters after the ending of the story, hint at it, or prophesy it, before you reach your dramatic ending. Do not shoot off a solitary remaining Roman candle after you have displayed your grand, final set piece.

Description

Some description is, of course, vitally necessary, but leave out all lengthy delineations of people, of places, of scenery. Scattered information about these through the story when they are positively needed, but sketch them in very briefly, suggesting just enough of general outline to let the imagination of the reader build up for himself the missing detail. If you *must* write description, write it. Be painstaking about it; show that your observation is keen and sympathetic; go over the work and polish it; get it so that it is really a poetic gem told in musical prose; then, having gloated over it to your heart's content, throw it away. It is only a clog upon the swing of your narrative.

The above, of course, refers to descriptive passages *as applied to short story writing*. If you mean to do descriptive writing

—if you have a strong natural inclination for it—that, of course, is a different matter. It is not meant here to decry descriptive writing, which is an art well worth cultivating, but merely to insist that description of any length has no place in the short story. Every short story writer should be *able* to write minutely detailed description, if for no other reason, to be able to judge what to leave out in condensation. This is largely a matter of observation, of logical arrangement, and of rhetoric, and separate practice in this will well repay the effort.

General Observations

Confine yourself as much as possible to definite action, and to conversation which is in itself both vital and interesting. Insert conversation very early in your pages. Some stories will not permit of this, but in the majority of cases if the first page of your manuscript contains no quotation marks, that is, no directly important speech delivered by one of your characters, you had best remodel your story to introduce conversation much earlier. There is a good mechanical reason for this. A solid page of narrative, especially at the beginning, looks very dead to the reader. The eye, glancing down the page, however, will catch a short sentence set apart in quotation marks, and if that sentence is a virile one, the reader, glancing over the pages of the magazine with no intention whatever of reading every

article in it, will go back to the introduction and begin the story which contains that virile sentence. It is legitimate to take advantage of this trait in human nature. If you have a message to deliver and can not get a hearing for it, you might as well not be possessed of the message. You must remember, too, that the same device which will catch the eye of the reader of a magazine will catch the eye of the person who reads your manuscript. It is a part of the art of story-telling to take advantage of all the little points which will render what you have to say more interesting.

Do not indulge in philosophy or comment except very, very briefly, and only when necessary to explain character. Even then your drawing may be much better accomplished by action or a terse bit of speech.

Be sure that you are in earnest; be sure that you believe what you say; be sure that your story is true in every particular, true in logic, true in character-drawing, true to the best instincts that are in you. No human being must be the worse for a line

that you write. If you have a gift you *must not* prostitute it. Perhaps all of us who have written have penned stories for which we are sorry, but if the constant attempt is put forward to produce the best there is in you, the general average is bound to tell, and the effort is certain to have its bearing upon your standing in the story-telling field.

Condensation

This part of the "editing" is so important that it has been deemed wise to consider it separately.

After you have finished, go over your story and cut out ruthlessly every unnecessary word, sentence, paragraph; every unnecessary page! Ask yourself, about each individual atom of your story, "Is this vitally necessary to the painting of my picture, the unfolding of my plot, the development of my climax?" If it is not, cross it out. If you follow this rule strictly you will find that you have destroyed most of your pet passages, your flowery descriptions, your philosophical deductions, your keen character analyses, but you will probably have saved your story from the wastebasket. Too much stress can not be laid upon this matter of condensation. More

good stories are probably ruined by beginners through the fault of diffuseness than through any other cause.

It is not meant that anything vitally necessary or interesting should be cut out to make your story shorter, but only that the unnecessary things should be shorn away. Unnecessary descriptions, unnecessary conversations, even unnecessary episodes will be found, upon careful editing. Some of these things you will think that you have expressed most neatly, and it will be difficult for you to let them go, but subject them to the one rigid test of whether they are absolutely essential to the development of your story. If they are not, you might save them with the idea of using them in some place where they will be more apropos, but in any event do away with them. This, during your apprenticeship. Later, after you have gained facility and judgment and insight, you may take liberties with this rule and permit to remain passages and perhaps incidents not exactly needful, but that are in themselves attractive enough to pay for the space they take up; but your judg-

ment as to this, in the beginning, will not be very certain, and it is best to hold very rigidly to your main theme. If you become proficient in writing, and find a market for your ware, and stay in the profession permanently, as the years pass on you will find yourself leaving out extraneous matter in the first writing, but it is almost impossible to do this at the start; there are too many temptations to take attractive by-paths. A good rule is to count the words after your story is written, cut out one-third, rewrite it so as to have clean copy, then cut out all you can additionally.

Length of Stories

In this place the proper length of short stories might be mentioned. Seven thousand words, by a known writer, is the utmost limit that is permissible in the average magazine, and even then the story must be one of most exceptional merit; but it would be almost fatal to his prospects for the beginner to offer a story of over five thousand words. Three thousand is a much better length, and the amateur will find a more ready acceptance for even a two-thousand-word tale. Almost any editor who would hesitate over a three or four-thousand-word manuscript would find space for one of equal merit of two thousand words, and be glad to get it; for there is a dearth of this length story. It requires much more skill to write an acceptable two-thousand-word story than one of seven thousand. Stories of from six

or seven hundred words to a thousand are also eagerly sought by many magazines which have a separate department for sketches of this length. These sketches are excellent practice, too. They should be confined merely to a dramatic climax and such absolutely necessary details as explain it and throw it into relief. Some few publications will accommodate stories of almost any length if of exceptional merit. If they are too long they are run as two installment or even three installment stories, but the drawback to this is that the market is so restricted, and if the "Saturday Evening Post" and one or two other publications which use them should refuse your stories of exceptional length, they stay upon your hands; so it is best to hold rigidly in the beginning to an absolute four-thousand-word limit, keeping as much under that length as possible.

Editing

This is of almost as much importance as the building of the story itself.

Certain authors who turn out very careful and very highly polished work, edit and even rewrite their stories an infinite number of times. This is largely a temperamental matter. Writers with newspaper training can scarcely be brought to do this, and in their case so many editings and rewritings are seldom necessary, for the newspaper worker learns to edit as he goes. The writer of this treatise almost invariably has his stories typed three times. The first typing is edited for both condensation and construction, but it would be better for the amateur to do this in separate revision. The first writing should be studied very carefully for construction. It might be necessary to alter almost the entire plot, to leave out or

put in episodes, conversations, and descriptions. In the second editing the condensation should be done. The third editing should be for polish, and in this the attempt should be made to improve all descriptions and conversations, to improve rhetoric and diction, to express every thought more cleverly. A fourth transcription should then be made on good paper for mailing, and this, before it is sent away, should be gone over very carefully for typographical errors. No manuscript should leave your hand until it is letter and comma perfect. No typographical slips, no careless typewriting should be permitted, for these things have their undoubted influence. The question of how many times you are to edit a manuscript, however, depends entirely upon your natural instinct and habit of accuracy, and the question is one which, after all, remains to be solved in practice, with perhaps a separate solution for each writer.

Preparing a Manuscript

By all means typewrite your offerings. It would be very expensive to hire this done, and might also be an unwise investment; but small typewriters can be bought very cheaply, and it is no trick for any person with a trifle of patience to learn to operate one with sufficient facility. Longhand stories, if legibly written, will be read, but the easier you can make it for the manuscript reader in the editorial office the more favorably he will feel toward your offering. Of course you will write only upon one side of the paper, whether you are preparing your manuscript in longhand or on a typewriting machine. If the latter, double-space your "copy," to allow of interlineations, and leave a reasonably wide margin. Write your name and address upon the first sheet, and put the page number upon every page, to-

gether with the title of the story, so that if the sheets become separated it will be easier to identify them and reinsert them in their proper places in the manuscript. It is not advisable to tack manuscript together by clips or fasteners of any sort. I have sent out hundreds of manuscripts, and have never fastened any of them together, and have never had a sheet lost from any of them. The reason for not binding them is that manuscripts are most conveniently handled by reading the first page and slipping it behind the last one, reading the second page and slipping that behind the first one, and so on, so that after the last page has been read and slipped behind the pack, the entire manuscript remains first page up, as it was before.

The rule about "mailing flat" has been promulgated so often by publishers that, by this time, it would seem everybody should know better than to roll a manuscript. From the experience of the writer, however, in handling the "copy" of amateurs, all people do not know this. Rolled manuscripts will not be read. They will be returned

without comment, no matter how good the story is. If you want to know the reason for this send away a rolled manuscript. After it comes back from its two weeks of tightly cramped wandering, try to hold it open and read it, and you will discover this to be almost a physical impossibility. Editors and manuscript readers are very busy men, and they have not the time to struggle with follies of this sort.

Use paper of the regulation size, approximately eight and one-half by eleven inches, and fold it, if you wish to save postage, the proper size to go in a "legal" envelope. A better plan is to fold it over just once. You can secure, very cheaply, stout Manila envelopes of just the right size to accommodate these half-folded sheets. When mailing a manuscript in this way, a sheet of pasteboard, cut to the right size, should be enclosed within it, unless the manuscript is rather stiff, to keep it from bending and to keep the corners from curling over. Still a better plan is to send the manuscript perfectly flat, without folding at all. Envelopes

of the proper size for this may be secured at almost any stationer's shop, and sheets of pasteboard, cut to the same size as the manuscript, should be placed front and back, slight rubber bands being placed around the whole before insertion into the envelope. This insures that your manuscript, clean and unbent, will lie before the manuscript reader as neatly as it lies before you after you have finished it, and the psychology of this fresh appearance is of just as much value as if you went in to see a business man neat and clean in place of rumpled and unwashed. You produce a favorable impression upon him in the first place, and then if you have anything worth while to say, you have secured an audience prejudiced in your favor. For this reason, after the return of a manuscript examine it critically, and if it shows the least sign of wear, recopy it before you send it out again. This seems a lot of work, *but it pays*.

Be sure that you prepay full first-class postage, and enclose a like amount in a separate small envelope, the latter marked on

the outside with the information that it contains stamps to a certain amount accompanying such and such a story. Do not write the editor a letter telling him how good the story is. Any letter to an editor, unless he has already accepted some of your stories, or unless you know him personally, is entirely useless. Your offering will rest strictly upon its own merits. Have your name and address on the first page of the story; that is sufficient. The editor knows to whom to return it if he can not use it, or whom to pay in case he accepts it.

After you have your manuscript ready to mail go over it once more. You may find a place to substitute a better word for one already used, to alter, at the last moment, a phrase or a speech so that it will be more to the point. You will invariably find some commas that should have been left out or places where some should be inserted; you will find one or more misspelled words, due to haste in writing, possibly, and other little defects the correction of which will make your offering more perfect. It might even

strike you that an entire page, or two or three pages, should be rewritten. If so, do not spare the pains, for in the long run this care will pay you large dividends. No business, and story-writing is a business, ever succeeded without a minute and painstaking attention to details.

Marketing

When your effort is ready, try to market it. Do not pay any attention to the criticism of your friends; do not bother them with your work. They do n't know anything about it, and if they did could not tell you. The only critic for whose opinion you need at all care is the public, and that public is fairly well understood by the men who buy manuscript.

Make up your mind to this fact; you will receive absolutely fair treatment. There is no "clique" in the publishing business, and it does *not* require a "pull" to obtain recognition. I can not understand how this silly idea of favoritism came about, unless it was evolved by unsuccessful writers to soothe their own sense of chagrin. I have met most intimately nearly every editor in the United States and have talked shop with them, not only in their offices but in their clubs, over luncheons and dinners, and I am

quite sure that there is no other business or profession in the world which is more frankly and honorably and openly conducted. The only passport you need to the courtesies and good graces of publishers is to have written a good story, one that is true in its analysis and portrayal of human life. They are on the lookout all the time for wholesome stories written entertainingly and from a fresh angle, and once that story is written, the entire profession extends to you the right hand of fellowship and welcomes you among the elect. Aside from the search for a new point of view, for fresh treatment in handling, the magazines are quite anxious to secure new writers because, for the same grade or sometimes even a better grade of stories, they pay the unpampered ones much less than they do those who have made their reputations. It is precisely the old law of supply and demand, as potent here as it is in the sugar and salt trade and I personally know that every physically presentable manuscript is *read*, not only dutifully but eagerly, in all the magazine offices.

Be careful not to go to the wrong market. Magazines are as different as people, and what suits one will not suit another. Study the different publications, and try to decide to which one your story will be most acceptable. The sort of material they are already using is the sort they want. It would be absurd to try to sell opera-glasses to a blind man for his own use.

Do not be discouraged! When your manuscript comes back it will no doubt be accompanied by a printed slip of rejection. This is the only criticism you may expect, but it will be sufficient; you will know that the story was not what was wanted. Study it over, compare it with the stories that are published in that magazine, and try to find out why yours was not good enough. If you find that point, eliminate it, and send out your manuscript again and again and again, going from the top down to the bottom of the list of the more than thirty magazines now buying material at prices which make writing worth while. My own first accepted story went a weary round and brought a ridiculously small price. My second I sent

to seven magazines before it was finally taken, but it earned me five times as much as the first. My stories now do almost no traveling, and they bring me exactly forty times as much as my first one, which, if you stop to think it over, is a very fair explanation of why the magazines are anxious to find new writers.

If you can secure a foothold at all, the business is quite profitable enough to engage your earnest attention. Within the year following the acceptance of your first two or three stories your earnings will probably be large enough for you to give up any other occupation and devote your time exclusively to writing. You will be paid a very small rate at first, but the rate is raised very rapidly if your work remains uniformly good. When your price comes up to five cents a word you may call your earnings an income, for you will be receiving from five to ten thousand dollars a year, the mere fact that you are obtaining the five-cent rate, which is a very good one, insuring that your work is enough in demand to keep you busy. On top of this income, which, by the way,

like an income in any other business, is only to be earned by continuous application, by the keeping of regular office hours as it were, there are the possibilities of book publication and of dramatic rights; and success in these fields means a comfortable fortune.

What I have set down here comes as the result of years of hard "grinding;" I only hope that the result may be to make the path easier for others. There is plenty of room in the profession; come on up and be one of us. If I knew of anything else helpful to say to you, I would say it, gladly. I can do no better, or no more, I think, than to recapitulate:

First, prepare to earn a living at something else for a time.

Second, test yourself thoroughly to see if you have the necessary qualifications for the profession.

Third, Work! Work all the time, before, during, and after your first success. Just work. I wish I could make you realize to the full just what it means to **WORK!**



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